

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 13, 2017

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

We write to express our concern in response to reports that the Department of Education, at your direction, is considering weakening civil rights investigations in schools, undermining the Department's ability to combat discrimination in our education system. We strongly urge you to withdraw these proposed policy changes in order to ensure that efforts to address the unfair and unequal treatment of students will not be hindered.


On November 23, 2017, the Associated Press reported that your Department was circulating a draft of proposed changes to school civil rights investigation procedures carried out by the Department's Office for Civil Rights (OCR). Reportedly, the proposed changes would narrow the scope of these investigations so that reported incidents are investigated in isolation rather than as part of a broader pattern of discrimination and bias. The purported draft would also permit a modification to how discrimination cases are handled, giving individual schools the authority to negotiate a resolution to the investigation before any information is released to parents.

Coming in the wake of an internal memorandum circulated by acting OCR Assistant Secretary Candice Jackson in June announcing the Office's intention to scale back its civil rights investigations, these reported changes call into question your Department's commitment to combatting discrimination in a meaningful and effective manner. The investigations of systemic bias that you are seeking to curtail have proven invaluable in identifying persons and policies within an institution that promote discrimination. Without examining reported incidents in the broader context of a school's practices, OCR cannot ensure that impediments to equal access to education are effectively addressed.


The Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights plays a critical role in exposing and correcting discrimination and bias in our public school system. The changes to current civil rights investigation procedures that you are reportedly advocating would severely undermine the Department's ability to combat systemic discrimination and unfairly weaken parents' ability to advocate on behalf of their children. Again, for these reasons, we strongly urge you to abandon these misguided proposals and reaffirm your Department's commitment to defending equal opportunity in our education system.


Sincerely,


Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress



Katherine M. Clark
Member of Congress


Jared Polis
Member of Congress



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress


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Member of Congress


Sheila Jackson Lee
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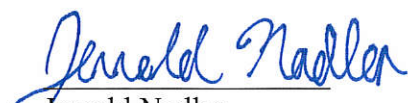

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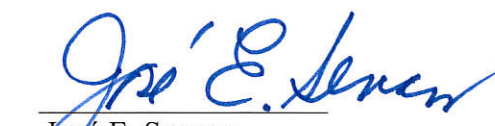

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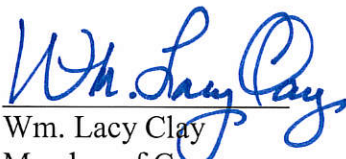
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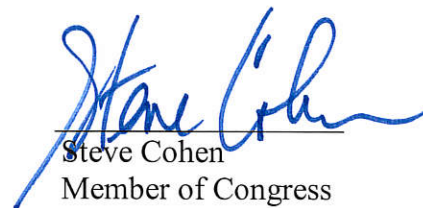
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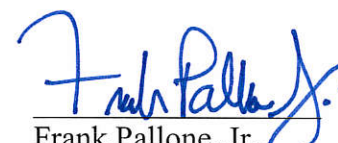

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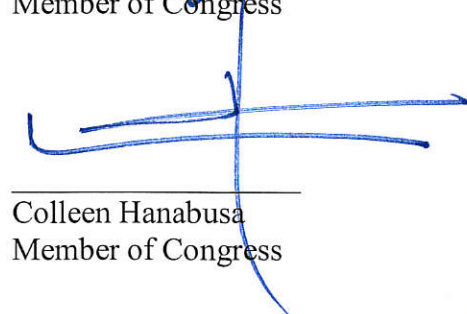

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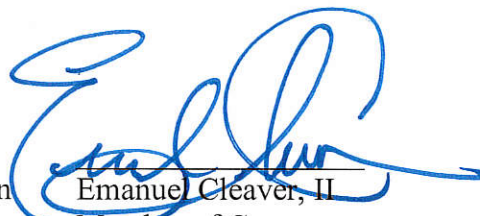

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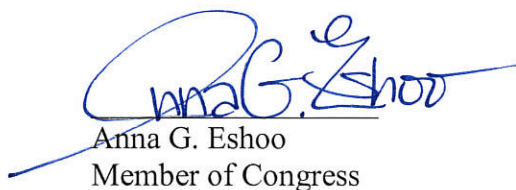

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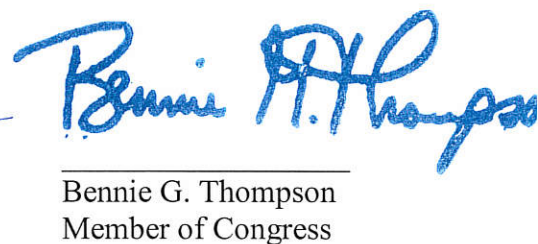

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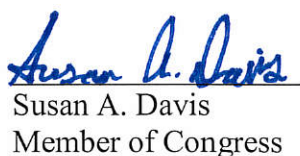
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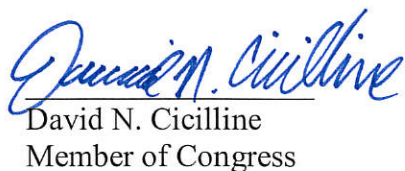
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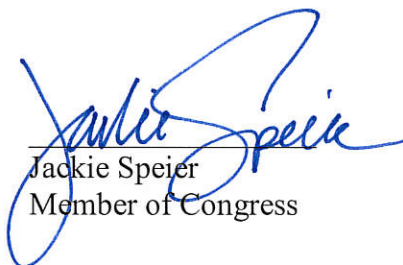
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